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TIDBITS

Tips and Helpful Links

Assessment Division

Addressing Student Variability

For many years we've approached lesson planning with the notion of the "average student" which was thought to comprise most of the class. Students worked with the same texts and supplemental materials, listened to lectures and answered closed, "correct" response questions, and were tested with assessments that required little more than information recall.

With the Arizona Common Core Standards (ACCS), a shift is underway in how we define learning and how students acquire and apply new information. In order for all students to achieve the desired outcomes, research is telling us it's necessary to focus on individuals – their needs, learning styles, and personal preferences. Todd Rose talks about incorporating elements of universal design for learning in his video – the importance of addressing individual differences in order to realize the full potential of every student.

Incorporating Technology

Taking advantage of the advances in technology is an excellent way to address variability among students. Innovations in technology are impacting every aspect of education, both on a large scale in how we approach time and space issues - such as flexible scheduling and options for online learning - to instruction scaled to meet the needs of particular students. These changes are coming about at lightning speed for a system that's been virtually unchanged for more than 100 years since its inception.

School leaders and teachers are struggling to keep up with the pace of innovation, both in terms of what limited budgets can supply and the professional development necessary for successful implementation. But in order to be relevant and engaging to students in the 21st century, schools must be intentional in integrating these changes. In one example:

"A recent survey by PBS Learning Media found that 74% of teachers incorporated devices such as tablets in their lessons. The survey also found that 69% of teachers using educational technology said

that it greatly enhances lessons and empowers them to teach like they've never been able to before."
Source: http://thenextweb.com/insider/2013/06/16/the-rise-of-edtech/

Bookshare is a great resource to investigate, providing a free accessible online library for qualified students and schools. You Tube, widely known for its viral videos, is rapidly becoming a source for interesting lessons posted by teachers across the country. Science, social studies, math, and foreign language are just a few of the areas featured and worth checking out to enhance your lessons or as a resource for students this year. Check here for more electronic resources offering flexible options to keep students engaged in learning.

Textbooks and More

The Arizona Common Core Standards (ACCS) are being employed in instruction across the state. They bring challenges for all students, but those with print disabilities will find aspects of them particularly difficult if not appropriately accommodated. The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, (NIMAS) in effect since 2006, stipulates that all U.S. textbooks be available as digital source files. With this technology, students with a variety of print disabilities can access grade level texts through alternate presentations such as enlarged print, text to speech, and Braille versions. Digital learning is highly motivating for most students. They can adjust the pace of instruction and review content as needed with mobile apps like Doodlecast Pro, another step toward personalizing and taking charge of their learning. There are also programs for learning organizational and social skills. Integrating digital technology boosts student interest and engagement, giving teachers options for presentation and students choices for showing what they know and can do.

Targeting Specific Needs

Specialized apps tailored to specific needs are helping to level the playing field and now ensure full participation by students who were previously marginalized in general education by disabling conditions. This link features the top 10 iPad apps for special education. The new Kindle offers options similar to those that will be featured as supports on the PARCC assessment such as highlighting tools and print preferences per page. It offers a higher maximum font size to accommodate those with vision difficulties. In Florida a wide variety of technologies are being utilized, including one called Comlink Enable Eyes that allows students who are unable to use hands, arms, or voices to engage with a computer by calibrating their pupils with the device. Computer-generated tactile photographs have recently been developed by a computer scientist at ASU. This technology has the potential for widespread applications that will assist the visually impaired with practical uses such as tactile floor maps for navigation to aesthetics such as art appreciation. For more information on this "seeing by touching" innovation, click here. Utilizing apps like these along with other universal design features in instruction will help ensure that our students are on track for college and careers.

The NCSC Instructional Resource Guide has recently been released to help teachers plan instruction for students with specific needs. This is the first of many resources NCSC plans to offer teachers to support the implementation of the Arizona Common Core Standards for students taking the alternate assessment.

Purchasing Decisions

Choosing which devices to purchase can be daunting for districts. In several states, districts have opted for multiple devices to meet the needs of students at different levels. They've found that the iPads' intuitive features seem better suited to younger students while notebooks work well for the tasks encountered in middle and high school curriculums. This link provides more information on how these purchasing decisions were made. Dell has developed a blueprint for personalized learning that can also help inform these decisions.

Lifetime Benefits

New technologies not only reduce the barriers to learning, but also enable graduates to find and maintain employment as they transition into adult life. The Labor Department reports that the number of employed disabled adults has jumped close to 4 percent over the past two years, partially attributable to technological advances that enable them to perform in the workplace.

Beyond employment, new technologies also make it possible for social and community involvement. A Braille Smartphone is in development that will enable text messaging and emails for visually impaired while video calling is revolutionizing communication options for deaf people who use sign language. Apple's Assistive Touch addresses the needs of people with limited mobility.

The PARCC and NCSC Assessments:

Online testing will feature new technologies that all students must be comfortable with during assessment, so it's important that both teachers and students are knowledgeable about the types of items that will be encountered. Practice with formats such as drag-and-drop, short and extended response, as well as the various accessibility features provided for all students are essential elements to incorporate into daily lessons. For examples of test items, visit PARCC and the NCSC information on page 32 of this link.

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